

WAVE SOLDER APPLICATION FOR BALL GRID ARRAY MODULES

Background of the Invention

1. Technical Field

5 The present invention relates to a printed circuit board and more particularly to a technique for fabricating a printed circuit board so as to prevent the flow of molten solder into a via during the process of wave soldering the bottom surface of the circuit board.

2. Related Art

10 A printed circuit board typically accommodates a surface mount device such as a ball grid array (BGA) module. A BGA module comprises an array of solder balls located on the underside of the BGA module. The top surface of a printed circuit board contains a landing area comprising a corresponding array of top pads. When a BGA module is installed on the landing area of the top surface, each solder ball rests on a top pad and is affixed to the top pad by means of a solder joint. Each such top pad is electrically connected to a via. The via is a cylindrical
15 hole extending through the thickness of the circuit board and is lined with a material, such as copper, that acts as both an electrical and a thermal conductor. The via provides a path of electrical conduction between the BGA module and electrical circuit patterns located within internal layers of the circuit board.

20 After BGA modules are installed on the top surface of a circuit board, pin-in-hole components such as connectors, SIPS, and DIPS are placed on the top surface of the circuit board

and are affixed by wave soldering the bottom surface of the circuit board. During the wave soldering of the bottom surface, the circuit board is transported over a molten bath of solder, wherein upward movement of solder through a chimney causes a fountain of solder to be drawn into pin holes so as to encase leads of pin-in-hole components. Unfortunately, the molten solder also travels up the vias. The hot solder within a via transfers substantial heat to its associated top pad because of a large thermal conductance between the via and the pad. Accordingly, the solder joint at the top pad is susceptible to reflow (liquidization and redistribution) from the applied heat, which may cause an open circuit. Alternatively, the heat and consequent reflow may degrade the integrity of the solder joint, thereby making the solder joint susceptible to fracture from stress during subsequent usage of the circuit board.

In order to avoid the expense and time delay associated with rework and repair due to impaired solder joints resulting from wave soldering, it is necessary to block the transfer of heat from the molten solder to the top pads. The prevailing method of inhibiting such heat transfer is to cover the via opening at the bottom surface of the circuit board with insulating material such as KAPTON™ (a trademark of DuPont) tape. See U.S. Pat. No. 5,511,306 (Denton et al., 4/4/94) which is hereby incorporated by reference. The technique of covering the via opening has the disadvantages of adding steps to the board-fabrication process and incurring the cost of materials such as the KAPTON tape.

Thus, there is a need for an efficient and inexpensive method of preventing hot molten solder from flowing up through a via during the wave soldering process in order to inhibit heat transfer from the molten solder to a top pad.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides a method of inhibiting the transfer of heat, during a wave soldering of the bottom surface of a printed circuit board, from the molten solder to a solder joint at a top pad on the top surface. The present invention creates a mechanical plug in the via prior to the wave soldering in order to obstruct the bottomside flow of molten solder into the interior of the via. By preventing the molten solder from transferring heat to the conductive lining of the via, the plug shields the top pad from heat that might otherwise cause degradation of the solder joint at the top pad.

Affixation of SMT components onto the bottom surface of the printed circuit board is accomplished by screening solder paste onto bottomside pads, dispensing adhesive onto the bottom surface in the vicinity of the solder paste, placing each component on the bottom surface by placing the component body on the adhesive and the component lead on the solder paste, and reflowing the solder paste and adhesive. This provides a mechanical and electrical connection between the bottomside components and the bottom surface. The present invention enables the plug to be formed as a part of this screening and reflow step. This is accomplished by having the screen comprise apertures corresponding to both the bottom pads and the vias. In this manner, solder paste is screened into the vias at the same time that solder paste is screened onto the bottom pads. The reflow step creates plugs of solder in the vias by redistributing the solder paste within the vias at the same time that the solder paste on the bottom pads are reflowed to form solder joints.

After completion of the bottomside process, BGA modules and other components may be affixed to the top surface of the circuit board by use of another screening and reflow process

which creates solder joints at the pad-component interfaces on the top surface of the circuit board. Next, pin-in-hole components on the top surface, as well as additional components previously mounted on the bottom surface, may be affixed to the circuit board by wave soldering. During the wave soldering of the bottom surface, the solder joints on top pads attached to vias are adequately protected from thermal degradation by the insulating effect of the plugged vias.

A solder plug in a via is effective for the present invention because the plug prevents molten solder from entering the via and the plug has a high thermal resistance to the conductive transport of heat. Nevertheless, because the solder plug is a good electrical conductor, the plug may serve as an electrical contact point for placing probes and the like during a testing phase after the circuit board assembly is completed. The plug provides the additional advantage of preventing oxidation within the via lining. This is especially valuable, because the material that lines the via, typically copper, is subject to oxidation and an oxidized via lining is ineffective for conducting electricity to an applied instrumental probe. Although the via lining is typically coated with a material that inhibits oxidation, this protective coating can be burned off during the heating phases (e.g., during reflow) of circuit board assembly. The consequent oxidation of the via lining after loss of the protective coating places an upper limit on circuit board assembly time. The solder plug of the present invention circumvents these problems by inhibiting oxidation of the via lining and providing an accessible electrical contact surface for an applied probe.

Thus, the present invention has several advantages. The present invention provides a low cost, time-efficient method of preventing thermal degradation of solder joints at top pads that are

FIG. 1 illustrates a top perspective view of a simplified circuit board 10 having a top surface 12, a bottom surface 14, and one or more middle layers. Assembly of BGA component 18 and other components to the top surface 12, and assembly of bottom components to the bottom surface 14, of the printed circuit board 10 may be accomplished in the following steps: (1) installing bottom components to the bottom surface 14, typically by the screening and reflow of solder paste; (2) installing the BGA component 18 and other components to the top surface 12, typically by the screening and reflow of solder paste; and (3) wave soldering the bottom surface 14 to affix pin-in-hole component surface 12 (e.g., connectors, SIPS, DIPS) as well as additional components previously mounted on the bottom surface 14. During the wave soldering, components affixed to the bottom surface in a prior step may be shielded from the wave soldering by use of a mask such as that described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,739,919 (Van Den Beek et al., 6/15/87) which is hereby incorporated by reference. Note that the first two steps, installing of components to the bottom surface 14 and top surface 12, are interchangeable for the purpose of the present invention.

FIG. 2 shows the top surface 12 with a BGA landing area 30 for receiving the BGA component 18 (component 18 is shown in FIG. 1). The landing area 30 comprises an ordered array of "dogbones" 31. Each dogbone 31 comprises a conductive top pad 32, a via 33, and a conductive connecting strip 38 that connects the top pad 32 to the via 33. The via 33 comprises a cylindrical void 34 within a conductive lining 36 through the circuit board 10 from the top surface 12 to the bottom surface 14. Each via 33 is electrically coupled to other vias and to other electrical components by electrical circuit traces 54 in the middle layer 16, as illustrated in a middle-layer cross sectional view in FIG. 3. It should be noted that a landing area for a BGA

middle-layer cross sectional view in FIG. 3. It should be noted that a landing area for a BGA component need not be based on a dogbone pattern. Any conductive pattern that connects a top pad to a via will suffice. FIG. 4, for example, illustrates a top surface 12 with a BGA landing area 40 in which a conductive connecting plate 48 electrically couples a top pad 42 to a via 43, wherein the via 43 comprises a void 44 within a conductive lining 46.

FIG. 5, which depicts a top perspective view of a via 33 connected to a top pad 32, illustrates the electrical connections of the present invention. The BGA component 18 (component 18 is shown in FIG. 1) contains an ordered array of solder balls 56 and each solder ball 56 is to be affixed to a corresponding top pad 32. The path of electrical conduction is from the solder ball 56 to the circuit trace 54: solder ball 56 to top pad 32 to connecting strip 38 to via lining 36 to circuit trace 54 (circuit trace 54 is shown in FIG. 3).

FIG. 5 also illustrates how, absent the present invention, heat would be transferred from molten solder 60 to the top pad 32 during the wavesoldering of the bottom surface 14. The molten solder 60 from the wave soldering source 58 is drawn into the via void 34, where it contacts the via lining 36 and passes heat to the via lining. Heat is then conducted along the via lining 36 into the connecting strip 38 (or into the connecting plate 48 for the configuration of FIG. 4) and finally into the solder pad 32 where it may reflow the solder joint and cause an open circuit or degrade the integrity of the solder joint.

FIGS. 6 and 7 illustrate how the present invention prevents heat from the molten solder from being transferred to the top pad 32. Referring to FIG. 6, which depicts a cross-sectional view of the printed circuit board 10 with a screen 62 mounted to the bottom surface 14, heat is prevented from being transferred from the molten solder 60 to the top pad 32 by modifying the

step of screening and reflowing of solder paste during installation of bottom components to the bottom surface 14. During the screening of the bottom surface 14, solder paste 64 is applied through the screen 62 to a bottom pad 66 to form a solder layer 68 (for subsequent mounting of a bottom component) and into the via void 34 to form a solder mass 69. After the screen 62 is removed and the bottom component is attached to the solder layer 68, the solder layer 68 and the solder mass 69 are reflowed causing affixation of the bottom component to the bottom surface 14 and redistribution of the solder mass 69 to form a plug.

The plug 70, which is shown in FIG. 7, is capable of inhibiting the flow of molten solder into the via void 34 in the subsequent wave soldering step, which effectively inhibits heat transfer from molten solder to the top pad 32. Generation of the plug 70 in the preceding screening and reflow step is essentially free of cost inasmuch as the screening and reflow is performed during the step of affixing the bottom component to the bottom surface 14. For embodiments not requiring screening and reflow to affix a bottom component, a screening and reflow step could nevertheless be added to prevent heat transfer from molten solder to a top pad 32.

Although the preferred embodiment of the present invention utilizes a screening and reflow process for generating a plug 70 in the via void 34, any method for generating a volumetric plug within the via void 34, that would effectively prevent heat transfer from molten solder to a top pad 32, is within the scope of the present invention. Likewise, the plug material need not be solder and the plug may comprise any material capable of thermally insulating the via from the molten solder.

The present invention encompasses any embodiment that creates a plug in a via void even

in the absence of a wave soldering step, since the plug may be useful for purposes other than inhibiting heat transfer. By its contact with the exposed surface of the via lining, for example, the plug may beneficially retard oxidation of the via lining. Additionally, an electrically conductive plug may facilitate the testing of a circuit board assembly by serving as an electrical contact surface for an instrumental probe.

Thermal degradation of a solder joint at the interface between a component and a pad is a potential problem whenever a top pad is electrically and thermally coupled to a via. Accordingly, the potential problem is not specific to a BGA configuration. Thus, while the preferred embodiment involves a via associated with a BGA configuration, the present invention encompasses any surface mount component affixed to a pad that is electrically coupled to a via, including a component having a lead.

Although the preceding description of the preferred embodiment depicts a printed circuit board as having a top and a bottom surface, any orientation of the circuit board with respect to the horizontal plane is within the scope of the present invention.

While preferred and particular embodiments of the present invention have been described herein for purposes of illustration, many modifications and changes will become apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to encompass all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit and scope of this invention.